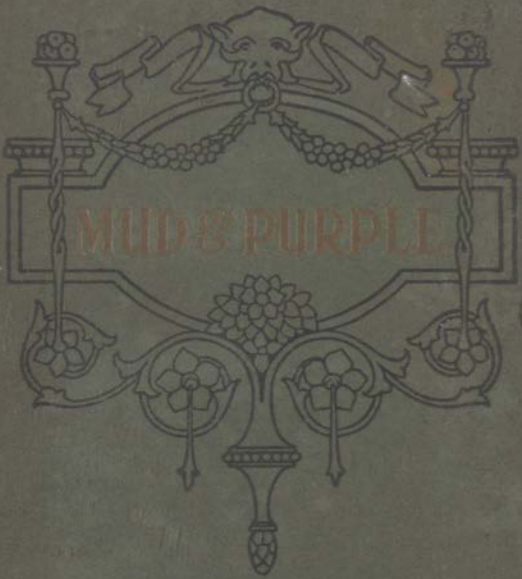

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SEUMAS O'SULLIVAN

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[SECOND EDITION]

Mud and Purple

Pages from the Diary of a Dublin Man

From an original drawing by E. F. Solomons.

MUD AND PURPLE

Pages from the Diary of a Dublin Man

By Seumas O'Sullivan

Dublin
The Talbot Press Ltd.
London
T. Fisher Unwin Ltd.
1918

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By the same Author:

NEW SONGS (*in collaboration*).
THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE
THE TALE OF NARCISSUS (*edited*)
THE EARTH LOVER
VERSES, SACRED AND PROFANE
PAGES FROM THE NOTE BOOKS OF THE LATE J. H. ORWELL
SELECTED LYRICS
POEMS (*collected edition with portrait*)
AN EPILOGUE AND OTHER POEMS
REQUIEM AND OTHER POEMS

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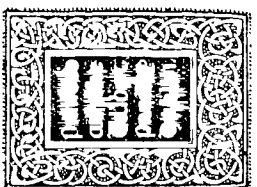


TO OLIVER GOGARTY.

Since you have loved my city well
Accept the book wherein I tell
Of common things that you and I
Held sacred in the days gone by.
Where those old lovely streets still hold
About them proudly, fold on fold
Their ancient purple, though the stress
Of a late age's littleness
Prevail around, and only they
Are mindful of a kinglier day.

And since you, too, remember still
The little street set on the hill
Where people wandered up and down
As in some mediaeval town,
Pursuing, calm, remote, apart
The business of no common mart,
The freshness of the morning sky
That faced the windows of the high
Old Georgian house that I had grown
To love, for what it held to me
Of that old courteous century.
And all the things that you and I
Held sacred in the days gone by
Accept the book wherein I tell
Of mud and purple, heaven and hell.

PHILIP SHARON.

HILIP SHARON had been doing the same things for longer than anybody could remember.

There may have been at some remote period those who knew him as something more than a shadow and survival, but if so they had long since gone the quiet way of ancient secret-keepers, and they themselves were long since but a memory—and a faded one at that. Not indeed that the doings of Philip Sharon were in any ordinary sense mysterious, but they belonged to the order of half-secret things—the only kind which seems to preserve about it any real secrecy at all. Every one knew that he lived in the tall old red-brick mansion, two houses from the turning of the road, and every one knew that he would emerge quietly from the stately old doorway each morning as the clock on the church tower of St. George's struck half-past nine. His unvarying

actions from day to day excited no more comment than did any of the tall old houses amongst which he lived, but his absence on any particular morning would almost have disturbed the procession and order of things as much as if one of those same old houses were to take wings and vanish in the night. It was generally known, though the source of the information was long since forgotten, that Philip Sharon went by circuitous streets each morning to a little office on the quay.

Some small example of that ancient kind of which the world knows nothing; totally useless for all business purposes, and whose only reason for existence seems to be the maintaining and perpetuating of that order of ancient clerks from whose ranks an occasional Charles Lamb emerges; say rather *on* which, as on a background, he is portrayed. Perhaps, after all, it may be that the only use of any rule is to serve as a background for the exception. Philip Sharon was part of the rule, part of the background; he could never, under any circumstances, have been anything else. But just as in certain landscapes a single poplar tree will draw the attention, not to

itself, but to the chain of poplar trees of which it forms a part, so in this eighteenth century quarter of purple houses and quietness, of ancient clerks and superannuated civil servants, did Philip Sharon stand out, a single completion of his order, a microcosm of that macrocosm in which he lived and moved.

As surely as the clock of St. George's struck the half hour so surely did the old gentleman in the faded frock-coat emerge from the ancient doorway, and as surely as he came to the branching of the Glasnevin Road so surely did he stand at the street corner until at least one funeral procession had passed him by. Philip Sharon had none of the modern ideas as to the abbreviation and curtailment of those posthumous rites and honours which are due to the dead, and the shabby old silk hat was lifted to uncover the silvery hair with a meaningful dignity which had a strangely alien charm. At first this salutation of the passing cortege had been, if not an accidental, at least a casual thing; but that was long ago, in the days before the idea which was eventually to prove his mission had come to him.

It was one day in early winter, when the rain was mingled with hailstones and the wind contributed its share to building up a threefold torture for those who had to leave the shelter of the house, that Philip Sharon, struggling along the quay-side, his topcoat wrapped tightly about his thin old body, had met with that dreadful hearse which had brought about the change in a routine which it seemed that nothing short of death itself could ever have altered. The two black horses were drenched with the bitter sleet, and their draggled plumes drooped down in preposterous attitudes along their streaming necks. The little purple curtains all around the coffin flapped unceasingly under the onslaught of the hail and rain. The drivers, swathed about with innumerable coats and capes, sat grimly intent upon the one idea of bringing them safely over the slippery stones. Philip Sharon stepped into a doorway for a moment with uncovered head, and none of these details escaped his steady gaze as the hearse went by him. But it was not any one of these things which engaged his thoughts as he arrived at the little office, and gave a new and curiously significant expression to the

usually unvaried serenity of his features as he returned to his house in the evening. It was the fact that the hearse was unattended by any mourning-coach. Not a single carriage had followed that lonely traveller on his last journey, and but for this chance salute of the passing stranger he would have passed unheeded to his ultimate resting place.

From that time Philip Sharon became a part of every funeral which took the Glasnevin Road. He was as much a part of it as the stately horses or the nodding plumes, or the red-faced drivers, who gradually came to know him, and finally to look forward to the spectacle of the quiet old gentleman who seemed to walk the road with no other object than, hat in hand, to give the last respect and honour to every unknown corpse. There was something so simple in his way of standing, so natural in his method of salute, that no one would ever have thought of remarking on his appearance or in any way disturbing him in his self-imposed ritual of respect.

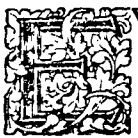
Winter came on once more and the funeral horses walked more slowly and carefully on the frozen roads; and Philip

Sharon was once more swathed in the ancient muffler which seemed to be almost contemporary with himself. But lately a subtle change had come about in all his movements, and a new and strangely pathetic expression had begun to settle on the undisturbed serenity of his features. The unmistakable signs of ancient clerkship had been replaced by the no less unmistakable tokens of the superannuated man. Those who saw him daily could detect but little sign of change, for Philip Sharon did all things gradually and with the leisured certainty of that century to which in truth he belonged. A slight deepening of the hollows about the unchanged sweetness of the lips, a deepening also in the melancholy of the gentle eyes, these were the only perceptible tokens of what the latest year had brought. And so at last one morning in the depth of winter, when the funeral horses could but keep their ponderous dignity by walking at an almost imperceptible pace, when the faces of the tall drivers had deepened to purple in the frosty keenness of the morning air, there was no one standing at the accustomed corner to do honour to the

passing cortege, and so also on the following morning. And on the third morning, as an unaccompanied hearse went slowly past the vacant corner, the driver and his companion looked at one another, and the driver muttered "strange"; but it was really not so strange after all had they but known it, for in the plain deal coffin beneath them Philip Sharon was lying at rest.

TWO IMPRESSIONS.

I.

 VERY day the greyness of the Dublin sky seemed to fold him in more closely, every day the struggle against its crushing influence grew weaker, the desire to escape became a more hopeless passion.

Every day found him standing longer and longer before the pictures in Cook's window. Once these pictures had been only a delight to him, but of recent years a new feeling had crept in. Now they seemed to have something of that awful appeal which the voice of Orpheus must have had to the ears of Eurydice as she sank down again to the coldness of her Lethean Kingdom. The absurdity of the representations, the glaring falsity of the colouring, were nothing to him, for his

eyes looked past them to the places whose names they bore.

Indeed, their exaggerated splendours seemed to him far nearer to the reality of things than any more truthful delineation could possibly be.

It might be true that it rained always in Venice, for him the skies there were always blue; and if, even in these imaginary pictures, the people walked and talked in modern ways and wore the banal dress of the present, for him they still moved in mediæval splendour on marble steps, or plotted darkly, robed and hooded figures, beneath the carved doorways of a more ancient city, and no one went without a sword.

To him the thought of foreign places meant the elimination of three hundred years, and for his news of them he would take the word of no romanceless modern, but went rather to those ancient travellers whose tales were always golden with the splendour of far places.

So day by day the greyness of his native skies seemed to grow sadder and his dream more full of the light of worlds not realised.

From Cook's windows to the quay was

but a little distance, and thither he would go when time permitted. Past the great steamers and the rush and rattle of the cranes, he would journey to that furthest pier, for it was from this little used and half grassy wall where, sometimes, a little sailing vessel cast anchor, he imagined his departure would be.

Here it was, so his dream (born of the longing of a life-time) had told he would find that great vessel one day awaiting him, its snowy sails and ropes already stirring with the breath of coming adventure.

The men about the place, the semi-mariners who are such an essential part of every pier, in whose language and gestures he found enough of the sea to give him kinship, knew well this lonely figure, and no one offered to molest or trouble him as he stood watching their leisurely business.

Their methods were a delight to him, their strange faculty (which they shared in some measure with the street navvies), of getting the rhythm of labour without the distraction of work, filled him with wonder.

Even the men who sailed up the river on the porter-boats, with whom it seemed the river had grown, through long associa-

tions to a kind of sympathy (a sympathy which found its expression in the colour of the water and the brown froth which churned about the bows), even these men with their fierce and absurd over-acting of nautical fashions had a share in his admiration. And when a boat, heaped up with porter barrels, puffed out of sight beneath a bridge, it had, as it were, sailed into the horizon, and he sent after it a silent hail and farewell as though its destination lay in some strange and still undiscovered land.

So, day by day, he stood beside the pier, or oftener, before Cook's windows, until the passing bank-clerks had grown to be oblivious of him, and only winked in passing their appreciation of his madness and their own intellectual fitness, to the policeman at the corner, who understood.

But time, that enemy of all romance, was ever at his elbow to curtail his dreams; the thought of the waiting desk, the idle pen, were like a summons to move on. "Time, a policeman in the service of eternity!"

II.

HERE were times when he had thanked God for a barrel-organ, but to-day, in the noisy streets, its ineffectual music seemed only to intensify his gloom, for it reminded him of the many projects which had never come to being. He had planned an essay on barrel-organs and the people who played them. At one time these men with their organised ineptitude for work, their insolent importunity, these women with their kerchiefs tied in the (supposed) Italian manner had seemed to him the type of a real Bohemianism, the only life of its kind in Ireland.

He had praised them because they had invented and continued a traditional life. To-day he cursed them—men, women, and music. For everything jarred on him. The battered music was torture to his tired ears.

Even their dirtiness offended him, yet back of his angry protest there was a real

desire to be of them, and after all (he asked himself, angrily, for the hundredth time), what kept him from such a life?

Only these moments, every day rarer, in which he touched for a lightning flash that life which was once his own. His wild fancy had pictured himself once as a sort of Icarus, still falling from a flight in which he had dared the sun a thousand years before the child of Daedalus was born.

An Icarus whose wings were not yet altogether vanished—that was his state. He knew that as long as there was the consciousness of that winged part of himself there was also the possibility of falling lower.

And now for the first time he longed intensely, hopelessly, to lose for ever those moments, to lose the possibility of touching again those heights which had once seemed to him his native region, to finish for ever his flight. How much would a barrel-organ cost him? And then there was the woman. She was essential to the success of the thing. Could he endure it? At one time the look, the voice, the gestures of street women, had filled him with disgust. If one of them by any chance

laid a hand on his arm, he felt almost physically ill. But all that had changed now. And after all, what great difference would there be in living with one of them. Some of them were almost beautiful.

It was half-past one o'clock, and from sheer force of habit he turned into the public-house where, for the year past, he had eaten his lunch. The kindly light of the two gas burners was a relief from the dead white of the mid-day light.

How familiar it had all grown—the long rows of men eating earnestly, the facetious bar-men with their air of eternal all-rightness, the marble handles of the porter-pulls, tall candles about the altar of the pint. Beside him a grey-haired vanman gazed across a pint into vacuity as if for a moment the hand that grasped the pewter handle was his only hold on life.

Through the closed doors the strain of a cornet came to him with added melancholy. "Surely," said he, "the cornet was designed of God Almighty to be the incidental music for a pint."

"Small roast and a bottle of stout." After he had finished the meat he sat for a while over his half-empty glass and went into the street again.

The rain had commenced to drizzle, and he had yet half-an-hour before he went back to work. The book carts!—but no, they would be covered with their sacks and oil-skins.

There was something he had forgotten yesterday. What was it?

He passed by a barber's shop and the thing occurred to him. He walked back again and turned the handle of the glass-panelled door.

"Hair cut."

The faint and enervating atmosphere, subtle with all strange sensations, that sleep which is amongst the barber's chairs, had begun its wonderful work, and when the obsequious attendant with bowed head proposed the mystical and dissyllabic question which is the beginning of his ritual, the very logos of the worship in which he is a priest, already half-indifferent to the course of material things, he responded with that proper affirmation, which, being the least of words, is most fitting to the sacred silence. (Surely in such a silence the breath of God first moved across primeval chaos)

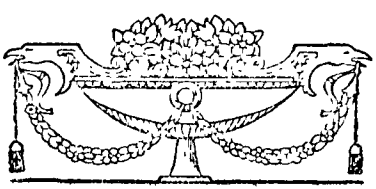
"Sleeves, sir?"

"Yes."

Silently, swiftly, with the least possible movement as softly as sleep itself, the mystic garment was drawn on; with half-closed eyes he saw its white purity, its single band of red. And now its folds had fallen about him, and he let himself drift slowly out upon the tide of that strange ritual in which he was suppliant, and priest, and deity.

In his ears there was for a while a faint murmuring like the sound of the wholly inarticulate Latin which wanders from far-off altars and by way of dim cloisters to thrill the hearts of worshipping women.

"Thank *you*, sir." He was in the street again, and now it was two o'clock; he must go back to his work. He had still a penny left, and he stepped on to a passing tram.



THE GEORGIAN (DUBLIN).

HAD been living for about three weeks in the northern side of Dublin when I observed him for the first time.

I must, of course, have seen him many mornings before, but I had taken some time to accustom myself to the life of the ancient quarter, and with that gradual assimilation of its "qualities" came the recognition of the man.

Indeed, I cannot help thinking, now that I have leisure to consider it, that this gradual and quiet entry was but in the nature of things, and that any entry more abrupt or sudden would have been utterly foreign to all the unruffled dignity for which he stood; of which, in truth, he came to be, for me at least, the very personification and type.

There was nothing particularly distinctive about his dress or appearance or manner,

nothing to attract the attention of the casual observer, or the all-seeing corner-boy, or any of the loiterers about those old-world alleys which lined his daily route. Speaking now from an intimate, I might almost say an interior, knowledge, I can say that any such peculiarity would have been irrelevant to his ordered existence—a negation, indeed, of those very qualities which he seemed to represent.

He was absolutely a part and portion of the streets he lived amongst, but such a portion as seems to exemplify the whole. I could never quite determine the exact age or period of his clothing. It seemed to be so moulded, probably by that scrupulous care of which it bore ample evidence, to the temperament and person of its wearer, and represented, almost as finely as he himself did, the perfect union and commingling of two centuries. His hat, a tall one of some apparently antique fashion, might have had its origin in the early 'sixties, or fifty years earlier, or, by a curious freak of fashion in the very year in which I first set eyes on him.

His coat and trousers—the latter well-cut and tight-fitting—might similarly have

graced, as far as their fashion was concerned, one of the heroes of Lever's invention, or a young blood of the past century's close.

I had long since given up the attempt to place any probable date on these vestments, which, quiet and unobtrusive as they were, seemed to claim at once the attention of anyone interested, as I was at that time, in the life of ancient Dublin, and my thoughts had settled to a quiet and unquestioning interest in this solitary figure.

Although I have now forgotten the details I remember as though it were yesterday the occasion of our first interchange of words. It was in a crowded tramcar, and the morning was an exceedingly inclement one in mid-winter. Some perfectly natural and, as it seemed to me, altogether trivial act of courtesy seemed to have broken through the hitherto impenetrable barrier of his dignified seclusion. I can still hear distinctly, and with a poignant pathos since added, the few words, well chosen and full of an urbanity long obselete, with which he acknowledged the petty attention.

As a general rule, it was his habit, as it was mine at that period, to walk into the

city in the morning, and it was but seldom that I did not pass him at some stage of the way. Since the incident of the tramcar, he had never failed to extend to me a quiet and gracious salutation as I passed him in his easy progress, and I had come to look on any morning in which I missed the customary greeting as wanting in some manner which I would have found it difficult to explain.

Once, and once only, for some reason which I cannot now recall, I had failed to respond to it, but the words in which he had forgiven my unintentional offence, and dismissed the affair as a "tabula erasa," and the fine gesture which accompanied the words, still linger in my memory.

At that time, when my mornings were hurried, and my daily journey citywards was, to use the vulgarism, "against time," the contrast of his stately and unbroken progress struck me with curious force. Three times only have I seen that progress interrupted, and I remember them clearly to this day. On the first occasion he was standing at the corner of Eccles Street, in converse with a small urchin who sat sunning himself on the broad steps of a

dilapidated tenement house, and I have before me even now the picture as I saw it then. The spring sunlight on the dark red walls, the huge Georgian doorway with its exquisite pillared porch, the small boy, pleased and interested with the unusual attention, as the courtly figure of my old-world gentleman bent for a moment above him. But more clearly than any of these things I remember the waistcoat which that urchin wore. It had been at one time a very gorgeous thing, and even now in its utter decrepitude its fine red cloth and solitary brass button had the unmistakable evidence of the century in which it had its origin. At the time I had no reason for supposing that the waistcoat had attracted the attention of my friend, but I have since come to the conclusion that it was responsible not only for his pausing, but also for the small silver coin which he dropped into the grimy hand of the delighted urchin as he resumed his way.

On the second occasion I found him standing at the corner of Blessington Street, his gray head raised with an intent and, as I now know, a sad and intensely pathetic interest. The ancient houses at the corner

of that most ancient street were in process of demolition, and the workmen were busy at their work of destruction. That second occasion has remained in my memory for a double reason. It may have been that I had then a better opportunity of observing him at leisure, but it seemed to me that I had sighted suddenly in his clothes and bearing some subtle change. The tall hat so finely carried was worn with a less confident air; the frock coat, always immaculately brushed, had just the suspicion of shine about the shoulders—a premonition, as it were, of the time when its age would become evident; the feet even had an indefinable air of tiredness, as though they had suddenly grown conscious of the approaching journey's end.

It may be, however, that even these things would not have so impressed the occasion on my memory were it not that for at least three months after that particular morning I missed the familiar figure on my daily journey.

Then, as I passed the same street corner, I suddenly saw him once more. The work of destruction had been completed; the ancient red brick and stately doorways of

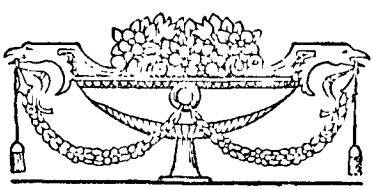
the older century had vanished, and the thin walls and stucco exteriors of modern shop buildings were hustling into their place.

I had been standing for at least a minute before I recognised the motionless figure half hidden in the shadow of a surviving doorway on the opposite side of the street, and seldom, if ever, have I suffered such a shock of pity as thrilled me at that moment. It was undoubtedly he, but it looked like, rather, the ghost or memory of that stately presence which had personified for me the life and being of the ancient places I had grown to love. There was still, even in his utter wreckage, that dignity which had always prevented me from taking the initiative in our occasional converse, and the thin old face upraised in its quiet anguish, was a thing beyond the solicitude of even my reverent interest. I passed on, and as I turned the street corner, he was still standing in the shadow of that solitary Georgian door.

Only once more did I feel the thrill of that austerely urbane presence. The last scaffolding had been removed. The ancient had vanished before the modern;

the new century had asserted itself, and with its coming came all the noise and turmoil and unrestful colour of the more progressive times. It was nearly a year now since I had seen my friend, and for some reason on this particular evening of autumn, I had been thinking of him, and of those purple shadowed houses with whose demolition he had seemed to vanish from life. The street lamps were shining with the faint glow of deep-sea flowers, and in their uncertain and transmuting glow I seemed to see the street again as I had known it two years ago. Then as I arrived at the corner, my breath almost failed me, for he was there standing in his accustomed place. At that moment I believe that even the long-respected barrier of his serene remoteness would have vanished before the joy of my half-involuntary greeting, but when I arrived at the spot on which he had been standing, there was no one to be seen. The street at the moment was quite deserted; there was no sign or trace of him in either direction, and a curious feeling, uncanny and inexplicable, settled suddenly on my thoughts. Had I ever really seen him? Was it possible that my daily

sojournings amongst these shadowy streets and lane-ways had excited my imagination into the creation of this dweller in their midst? In vain I tried to combat the new and disturbing fancy. Had I not seen him, spoken with him in very reality? Had I not, too, seen in these ancient doorways strange, life-like shapes and figures which had vanished on my approach? Had I not, on more than one evening, seen the great windows of tall houses blazing with myriad candles, and heard the roisterous companions within? Had I not even tried to respond to their chorusing, and found myself shouting foolishly before the lifeless doorway of some deserted tenement? But I had already arrived at my lodgings; the great hall-door swung to behind me, and, for a little while at least, it shut away from me a world of questionings and doubts.



WINTER SUNLIGHT.

T was all about me, but almost unnoticed until I arrived at the corner of Merrion Square. Then that undersized youth who bears his miraculously preserved life amidst the chaotic traffic with such easy responsibility, and incidentally changes the points on the tram lines, threw his small steel pointer into the air and caught it again with a fine precision. As it fell the sunlight flashed for a moment on its graceful rotations. Almost immediately afterwards a cripple who stood at the street crossing seized his crutch and twirled it with an easy elegance which would have done credit to a Grafton Street dandy. I was suddenly aware then that the winter sunlight had captured the city, and we were all in golden chains—delicate, slender, almost invisible, chains that drew us skywards to adventure, to life.

The trees in the square, at all times

graceful, this morning had a voice and language. A tall and *blasé*-looking poplar as I passed was telling some ridiculous story to a little group of laurels, and their green leaves shook with laughter as sunny smiles went around the listening circles. The tall old red-brick houses on the eastern side breathed in the keen light in deep-chested enjoyment as though they would draw it into the purple souls of them.

Even the ridiculously cropped poodle who trotted in front of me seemed to feel the sunlight touch his frozen hide, and his tufted tail went waving to the rhythm of some remembered joy.

The flower girls sitting by their baskets, a pageant of splendid squalor, added something to the colour of the day, and the flowers themselves gave back in armfuls the sunshine their little hands had beckoned from the sky.

City eyes are but seldom turned skywards, but to-day there is no denying the call that racing clouds shouted to our thoughts. Little fluffy clouds, like white-frocked children, squeal a silent greeting as they race across the blue, and great stately shapes, like the wraiths of

mythologic hero-herds, seem to wander more slowly above the historied Ford of the Hurdles, as though some memory stayed them.

A man at the corner of Merrion Row lifted his hat with a quiet gesture, and then replaced it quickly, with a hurried glance at the passers-by. It was, I had no doubt, an act of worship, the peculiar form of ritual by which some half-forgotten part of him made obeisance to the sun.

I know now that I was in error when I turned aside and halted before the book-seller's window. Habit was, perhaps, too strong for me, but I should have remembered that books have nothing whatever to do with the sun. The library in a garden remains as distant as the sheep walks of Arcady, though it would have, no doubt, a rental considerably smaller than that of a castle in Spain.

George Moore had just been saying farewell in three large volumes, and the window was crowded with his works. Winter sunlight! Perhaps, there was, after all, some deeper reason for my pausing before this pageant of his story. For in these volumes has not the author of

"Spring Days" given us, indeed, the picture, sunlit in many places, of the winter of his life? Only an old and experienced romancer could have babbled so voluminously with such charm.

All through, to me at least, the work suggests more than anything else the overheard murmurings and reminiscences of an elderly man, of an elderly *gentleman* in places, talking quietly to himself. But still through all the thoughtful garrulousness, abusive, querulous, or merry by turns, comes flashing, like sunlight through the leafless branches of the Luxemburg Gardens, that air of youthful irresponsibility which seems to be inseparable from his work.

Nevertheless, I know that I was in error when I paused before the bookseller's window, for when I turned to the street again the sunlight had vanished, and with its vanishing came crowding doubts and questionings—a gloomy negation of all my happier thoughts.

The small boy on the tram lines was but attempting to unfreeze his lifeless fingers. The sunlight had not in reality warmed the black poodle's frozen hide, and his tail

wagged merely with the motion of his trot. The cripple was only readjusting his crutch arm, and, although I had long since passed them, I could still see the flower girls in their thin rags shivering beside their wretched bundles of cut flowers.

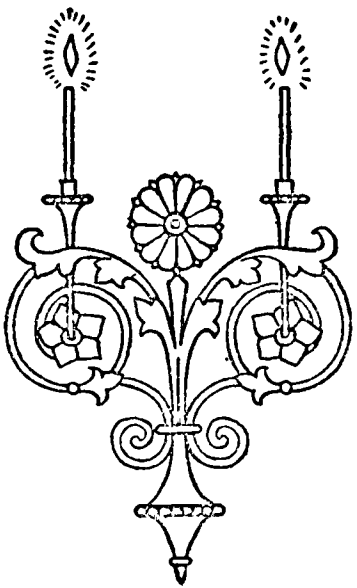
This winter sunlight was only a delusion, a thin pretence, a merely surface ecstasy, a thing of no lasting or duration. The chill of the unlit asphalt drew my eyes and held them as I fastened another button of my coat.

The man who had lifted his hat at the corner had, doubtless, done so in response to some utterly material necessity, some unspeakable animal need. Even the very pages of "Hail and Farewell," perchance, had borrowed something from a momentary humour of my own.

Reality? Unreality? It was all too perplexing to unravel. The real and unreal had become knotted in a tangle as inextricable as the traffic at Nassau Street corner; and my mind, as ineffectual as the hand of a Dublin policeman, quailed before the attempt. Then, as I arrived at the corner of Ely Place, as if to put the

finishing touch to my bewilderment, the sunlight reasserted itself.

It was shining now on the tall poplar trees amongst which George Moore walked in his garden and invented the story of his life.



A NOTE ON CUCUMBERS.

BY Rathgar, as I came from the mountains, I met the procession of hat-conscious ones. Stately, immaculate, sombre, they marched with the enforced solemnity of funeral horses, and to me their every movement was a rebuke.

The very sunlight seemed to shine on their glossy hats with a subdued brilliancy, as though it had grown aware that its full lustre had in it something too secular for such a holy time.

Truly an imposing sight, and one calculated to strike terror into the heart of the Sabbath-breaker.

But for some reason—I am inclined to blame the branch of hazel which I had picked up beside the river and carried with me into town—for some reason, on this particular morning, I found my thoughts turn more to philosophy than to religion, and criticising rather than acquiescing in the ritual of their elephantine solemnity.

Concerning this custom of worshipping God in black, this funereal method of celebrating the mysteries, several theories have currency; and while some would make it a thing of but recent origin, and contemporary with the evolution of the doctrine of hell, there are many who would give it a more ancient origin and almost the same horoscope as the world.

At this particular moment, however, I was not concerned with any of these theories, but with something of vastly greater importance—with something which must hold a terrible and special interest for all who have at heart the real interests of the country in which we live.

I mean the gradual and all too palpable diminution of the sunlight in Ireland.

For years—indeed, I may almost say from boyhood—I had vexed my heart with this problem of the diminishing sunlight, in the search for the authors of what I regarded as a treachery against life itself, and some possible means for its arrest.

And confronted suddenly by this band of black-robed celebrants *(la messe noire?)*, I seemed to be on the verge of finding at last a theory worthy at least of

serious consideration. For black we know is the colour which absorbs most light.

Now I had always suspected that this kidnapping of the sunlight was not the work of amateurs, but rather of skilled thieves, who wasted, as it were, no time in the ante-rooms but went directly to the strong-room and to the place which held, they knew, the precious thing. Witness the value of the thing stolen.

For as surely as there is a light of morning and a light of mid-day and a light of sunset, which is the most precious light of all, so surely have these things their counterparts in life, and against this last it is the treachery I speak of has been directed.

Look on this picture and on that, compare the old age of our own time with that which was known to the ancients.

In the old days a man might hew out for himself a new pathway to the very end of life, but nowadays we fall into a groove already made for us when we have gone but two-thirds of the journey, and our last years are but a rehearsal of our coffined state. The Greeks, who had no thought of the worms, went nobly to death and *lived*

to the last minute; but we Christians, who have, professedly, such a blessed assurance of a glorious *Life Hereafter*, have our thoughts for ever on the grave; and many a clergyman who carries a golden cross dangling from his watch-chain might, with more honesty, wear a gilded worm there. The Greeks were wont to carry their ancient Bacchus through the streets in open triumph, his silver crowned with ivy; but we think it shame to see an old man go quietly into the private door of a tavern. Our Bacchic rites are celebrated sadly behind drawn blinds, and the question which is put to the footsore wanderer has always seemed to me to hold more than a savour of irony. All the drinking of our day has been relegated to the youth of the country, and they, poor victims, are fast bending beneath the too-great burden, so that we are like enough to have, after all, a Bacchus white-haired but without wisdom, old but with unmellowed heart.

The laughing nymphs were chased by satyrs in woods that were hardly older than themselves, but we have been taught to look with suspicion on an old man who can but distinguish between a plain woman and a beautiful one.

So well has the cult of this new morality been urged that the passions of the aged in our time have grown subdued enough to receive the sanction of the Church.

Can one conceive of a Ulysses of our day—if, indeed, our day could produce one —setting off like that ancient hero for those far-off and imagined happy islands at the very end of life? It is impossible to conceive of, so changed are the conditions. For it is to the West these happy islands have always called the voyager, and what Ulysses will set sail for a West which wants the sunset colour?

In the grey gloom which is fast overtaking this once green land of ours the forests which were her glory are rapidly falling from her. Soon there will remain but a few lonely woods like mist entangled on the heather, and these, too, will soon vanish, to make way for the grey walls of monasteries and workhouses and asylums.

It is but a little time since the morning stars sang together for us, but we have forgotten the morning before mid-day; our laughter has but little mirth in it, and silence is our nearest approach to the music of the spheres.

WILLIAM JOHNSTON.

ILLIAM JOHNSTON was an Orangeman from the topmost curl of his neat auburn ringlets to the soles of his neatly-shod feet. His people had been Orangemen before him for countless generations, and before the term "Orange" was invented they had been firm adherents of that particular form of unquestioning bigotry which came nearest to the Orange idea, and from which ultimately it had its origin.

He could never, except by the direct intervention of Providence, have been anything else, and William Johnston was not at all the kind of person with whom Providence was likely to concern Himself to the extent of a special intervention.

When William Johnston arrived in Dublin he was the most orange-looking person who ever descended from his Northern paradise to the earth of the Fenian capital.

His voice, his eyes, his gestures proclaimed most clearly his divine origin. Indeed, it was commonly reported that his hair had once been orange also, and that, through the very intensity of his Orange feeling, it had deepened to its present auburn hue.

But that is as it may be, William Johnston was a perfect type of his order, and might have sat for the portrait of the Complete Orangeman, if it had been possible to imagine him ever sitting at all. He always stood. He was probably born standing, for his feet were in all probability already set firmly on that one foundation prepared for him by countless ancestors, and no other position would have given him a similar ease.

He stood at his work in the office; he stood at the counter of the restaurant where he eat his mid-day meal; he stood at evening in the gaslit tavern to which he journeyed nightly, and where he quenched with copious draughts of the darker beverage that burning flame of Orangeism which would otherwise have burst forth, most certainly, like the sword of Lugh to the devastation of those Fenian drinkers,

through whose ranks, like a god in exile, he moved with the loneliness of a god.

For at least three years after his arrival he lived a life apart, but after that, and by degrees which he himself could never clearly trace when he tried to recall them, he became gradually involved in those circumstances which eventually brought about what in after years he invariably referred to as "the clouded period of his life."

It began in the simplest and most obvious manner and progressed in a very natural way. I think it was merely a matter of a match.

In the tavern one night as he stood alone and morosely sociable in a line with the other drinkers, the man beside him had turned to him and requested a match. Johnston had given it to him, and the man, in thanking, had added some trivial over-word to the accustomed phrase.

The man of this chance meeting, Henry Gerard, was almost typical of a class which Johnston in disgusted irony had named "Spoiled Poets." "Dublin," said he, "is almost as full of Spoiled Poets as it is of Spoiled Priests." He was wearing the soft

black hat which seemed to be the badge of his disreputable order. The hat which had at first, on his arrival, moved the hard-hatted Northerner to fury, but which (had he but known it!) he himself was, later, to adopt and even to defend as "the only rational headgear he knew of."

There was nothing particularly alluring in his personality; he was one of hundreds who frequented the dingy taverns of his native city, and as pronounced a failure as the most thread-bare of them all. A haggard, sad-faced man who drank quietly and deeply, and always. None of his contemporaries could remember the time of his first appearance in the tavern, or the method of his arrival; he was part of it all and had settled there as gradually and with as little observation as the slowly deepening colour of the once white-washed walls, or the many-shaped stain upon the wooden counter.

None of his companions had seen or read the three or four small volumes of verse which he was known to have published in his younger days, but his reputation for these same verses was a certainty which even his enemies would have hesitated to

impugn. It was one of those vague reputations built up, perhaps, upon the prejudiced opinion of some appreciative friend, which grows by suggestion, and which nothing could ever shake. It is doubtful indeed if even the finding of one of these almost mythical productions would have in any way detracted from his shadowy repute. It was generally known that Gerard had at one time been associated with a certain sect of religionists, of a determined evangelical tendency, that he had actually conducted services in a lonely little building, on a country road beneath the Dublin Hills, but at the present time, not even the most ardent of "soul-savers" would have concerned himself for a moment with one who had sunk so much beneath the level of Sin. Amongst his old-time acquaintances he had been looked upon, it was said, as a Methodist with leanings towards paganism, amongst those of a later day as a pagan with Methodistical "backslidings."

Many names had been suggested in definition of his curious personality and had held for a while in the converse of the tavern, but they had all been long since

forgotten. Gerard was simply Gerard; nothing more could be added, nothing else would suffice, and any new criticism or appreciation of him would have met with as much indifference or even suspicion as would the name of a new drink in the tavern in which his uneventful evenings were passed.

There was nothing in any way alluring about the personality of Gerard, and yet he was a much sought-after man. To his friends his presence, or to be more correct, his propinquity, had grown to be almost a necessity, and even amongst his enemies a temporary absence had been known to create a real if unacknowledged want—an unrest which they could not, had they cared to attempt it, explain.

It may have been that even to the day of this meeting the conversation of Gerard and his method of expression still held something reminiscent of his street preaching days, for otherwise it would be extremely difficult, though not without interest, perhaps, to determine why that particular overword had attracted the attention of Johnston, but interest him it certainly did, and in five minutes the two

men were talking like friends. I use the word friend, of course, in the most superficial sense of the word, for Johnston could never under any circumstances have been the friend of any man. Nature, in the making up of his tight little personality, had omitted, as being immaterial to the constitution of an Orangeman, perhaps, that quality of which friendship is made. Johnston never really trusted anyone.

I have no intention of attempting to retrace those steps by which the retrogression of Johnston proceeded, for even to him it has always been a matter of extreme difficulty, if not an altogether impossible thing, and it is certain that, though gradual, they were rapid and uninterrupted in their progress.

The man of the black hat had from time to time introduced him to others of his disreputable flock, and one evening Johnston had, almost without knowing it, committed himself to helping in the establishment of a magazine in which, it was advertised, the maintenance of "independent thinking" would be the leading aim. It may have been that the very word "independent" had appealed

to him with some memory of a certain "order" with which his early days had been associated. It may have been that he saw in the establishment of such a paper the possibility of spreading through the darkness of the Fenian city the bright light of Orangeism for which his ancestors had died. His first contribution dealt with the Northern outlook, and would have done credit to *The Northern Whig*, but when a very few numbers had been issued a curious change came over his writings and his subjects became more numerous and more widely diversified.

A fine essay on the English of the Bible was followed by articles of a more general literary interest, and before a year had passed he had written of almost all those subjects which engaged the thoughts of all the thinking people of his time, and on all of those subjects he wrote with a cultured dogmatism which was vastly pleasing to the more scholarly of his readers.

On one subject only was he uniformly and consistently silent, if we except that small first book, "The Gleam," in which he had dealt with it but in a strangely

unusual fashion. I mean, of course, the subject of women. Johnston was, amongst the outer circle of his acquaintances, held to be a woman-hater, but such he assuredly was not. Indeed, if it be true, as someone has stated, that a man may be known by his silences, then this particular subject of feminity must have lain strangely near to his heart.

Once only had he been known to speak of it at any length. It was in the corner, I think, of the accustomed tavern the incident occurred. One of the group, mostly writers, had put forward in very strong language his theory, or rather statement, that it was absolutely impossible for any writer who had not known women in all their relations, to write of the subject with any authority. To the amazement of all present, Johnston had joined very hotly into the discussion from the opposite point of view. This subject, he held, could be treated by any writer of ability from a purely imaginative standpoint. He ended his truculent statement with a fine tirade against what he called the disgusting immorality of nearly all those frequenters of the tavern with whom he sojourned

nightly. The first speaker, when Johnston was silent again, had added as a proof of his statement the ineffectual treatment of the subject in that early work to which I have referred. The author of the book immediately retaliated with the explanation that it was a first book, and that he could easily produce, if given the requisite time, a story in which he would deal with the subject from an imaginative standpoint, but with the added mastery which five years of authorship had brought. The challenge was laughingly accepted, and most of us, I fancy, dismissed the matter from our minds.

But about a year afterwards Johnston astonished his acquaintances and delighted the reading public with a novel, or, to be more accurate, a short story, in which he gave a study of a woman, written, as it could only be written by a master of English and by one who knew his subject intimately. Johnston, in receiving the congratulations of his companions in the tavern, had reminded them of the challenge of a year ago, and the evening had ended in champagne.

But some weeks later one of these

disreputable spoiled poets with whom his temporary lapse had originated, who was spending the night, as was the wont of his class, in a little tenement house off Gloucester Street, if I remember rightly, had in the early hours of the morning discovered beside his bed a copy of "The Gleam." The absurdity of finding the book in such a place had induced him to examine it more closely, and then, to his utter amazement, he had found upon the fly-leaf, in the author's unmistakable handwriting, the inscription: "To Maggie from the Author," and a date which fixed the time of the gift some three years earlier. When William Johnston arrived in the tavern on the following evening he knew himself a discovered man and his favourite theory without a leg to stand on. From that moment his reformation, or, to use the term in which he himself would have preferred to express it, his return began.

It commenced in the true Orange fashion, with a self-reminder of the Divine Cause for which his ancestors had fought and triumphed, and proceeded to the contemplation of those ancestors themselves.

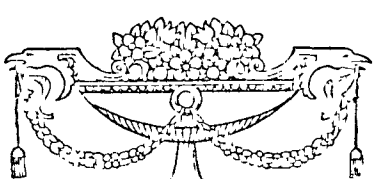
William Johnston's youthful dreams had

been filled with pictures of those mounted warriors, at the head of whom, of course, rode the immortal figure of his heaven-born namesake, as they cut their victorious way amongst the flying Jacobites along the Valley of the Boyne, and the huge stone horse in College Green, whose inward fore-leg seemed to threaten the smouldering fires of the Fenian capital, had for long been the object of his homage as he passed it day by day. In a recent volume of poems, by an Irish poet, too, he had found a brief but perfect reference to young men who "rode upon horses," and the phrase had remained in his memory since he had read it. To ride upon horses, that was the mark, the unmistakable sign and proof of that ascendancy for which his exile spirit pined.

And so, when he found one day in the pages of the *Daily Express*, to which, even in the depths of his clouded years he had clung despairingly, an advertisement in which a certain professor of equestrianism guaranteed to communicate the splendid secret of that art to "gentlemen" at an absurdly moderate figure, he saw in this chance advertisement the hand of the god

of his fathers and a way of return to the state from which the chances of the past few years had kept him alien. Thereafter followed three days of riding lessons and despondency of mind and extreme soreness of body, but on the fifth day William Johnston rode proudly forth into the long stretch of the Fifteen Acres, a horseman in word and truth; and from that day forward the North had claimed its child again.

A few months later, in consequence of some change in court routine, a serene and truculent and well contented Orangeman stepped on to the Northern train which leaves the Amiens Street terminus at 6.30 P.M., and at 10 o'clock the fifes and drums of a band which walked by the Shankhill Road to Sandy Row announced, although they knew it not, the return of a rescued soul.



IN A MUSIC-HALL.

HE very exterior is a summons to pleasure, and the flaming lights which emblazon the name across the water, whose reflections flow like rivers of light across the darkness of the Liffey, seem to call to the sense of enjoyment and give already a foretaste of the dancing joys within.

The devotee of pleasure though he subside ever so wearily into the cushioned ease of the velvet-covered fauteuil, sinks with an impetus towards enjoyment and with a direction pointed for his joy.

It wants but a few moments of nine o'clock, and the members of the orchestra —in their ponderous dress-suits, which give them a strange similitude of policemen in plain clothes—are taking their places in the curtained sanctum beneath the stage.

Last of all, stepping swiftly, lightly, yet with a due sense of his all-importance,

comes the little conductor, immaculately dressed. With a low bow, full of grace, to the audience, he takes his place upon his chair.

His right hand, delicately gloved, holds delicately the little ivory baton for a moment suspended in the air. The music begins, and with the first note of it his left hand comes to life. And what a life!

The butterfly emerging from the dark captivity of its chrysalis chamber comes not more exquisitely and exultantly into the sunlight of the early summer.

Now like a white flame in the darkness it leaps to a sudden flash, now hangs suspended in mid-air like a hovering seagull above the crested wave, now the fingers seem to press the notes of some invisible organ and draw sweet sounds from the void.

Again, like a small thunderbolt, it seems to threaten the bowed head of the leading violin, now waves a graceful benison to the flautist on the left.

The overture is ended, and after a moment, filled with the rustle of the deftly-turned band parts, the incidental music begins.

The screen, with its array of hideously assorted advertisements, has been lifted, and the more soothing crimson of the velvet curtain is before the eyes. With the ending of the overture this too is raised and with the third bar of the incidental music the first turn takes the stage. It is a tall figure, a man, with a dirty collar and in a costume which is almost pathetic in its absence of humour. After a few preliminary gestures, mainly of knees and shirt cuffs, he takes a central position, bends slightly towards the conductor and begins to sing.

The men amongst the audience are immediately, and as with a single impulse, buried deeply in their evening papers. A girl in the gallery titters, and a whispered remark is repeated more loudly by an encouraged swain. One is suddenly conscious of the rows of curious animals encaged with iron railings beneath the roof.

The blue smoke wreaths of a hundred pipes rise upward from the stalls and half way meet the mingled odours of cut plug and oranges which seem to exude perpetually from the warm humanity behind the gratings. From the second

circle comes forth in battle array another and distinctive whiff in which the military "Woodbine" takes an honourable and commanding place.

From either side of the stage shoot forth occasionally, like champions springing to single combat, the thin blue lines from the shilling cigars of the *blasé*-looking bank clerks who sit in either box.

Beneath the roof they meet, all four, and there all night they wage a malodorous warfare, and through the reek and fume of it the stage grows gradually dimmer until at last it seems but an insignificant picture set afar in space.

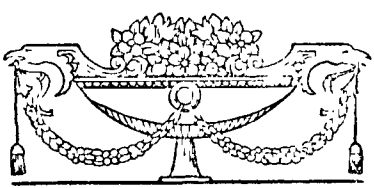
Turn follows on turn like the irrelevant incidents of a meaningless dream. The procession of figures from the stalls to the bar has become almost constant, and each returning pilgrim seems to add something to the building up of that atmosphere of kindly appreciation which is to the artist of the "Halls," perhaps, what the "Academy pitch" is to the hardened Academy exhibitor.

Turn follows turn. Strong men and fluffily skirted girl dancers, conjurors with eloquent shirt-cuffs, and comedians with

their dreadful jokes, all move unceasingly through the deepening atmosphere like the figures of some uneasy dream. Dream figures, indeed!—for concentrate your attention on any one of them, and lo! it has vanished from the stage. Wish it ended, and half eternity seems to be included in the turn.

And so the night wears on, and the atmosphere grows ever thicker, and the malodorous warfare goes on unchangingly in the heights, save only when some defeated odour falls headlong from that lofty battleground, to perish in the patchouli of the stalls.

But through all the deepening mist of vaguely moving figures and vaguer music, floats undimmed that delicate left-hand of the conductor—*a lily in hell.*



FANLIGHTS.

IS road to the office each morning was through faded streets and by way of strange and half-deserted squares, once the centre of that long-departed society which had at one time come near to placing Dublin in the first rank of European cities. So often he had come through these places that he seemed to pass them unheeding; but he knew that each day brought him to a closer contact and to a more intimate knowledge of their posthumous existence.

The dusty hall doors, not infrequently adorned with quaint and beautiful knockers (survivors of the famous wrenching escapades of the young bloods of a past century) which seemed to be perpetually closed against all but the undisturbing routine of a quiet tradition, were the objects of his unfailing (if unexpressed) veneration. Their very dust was sacred to him, and the re-painting of them an outrage on his

feelings. The great square windows, built in the old grand manner, and with a proud disregard of space-value, he worshipped as monuments to a larger and more leisured day.

But long since he had turned with the restlessness of a modern from that century to which in truth he belonged to seek in these places for some link with his own day. Half-consciously he had sought it, and almost unknown to him it had come into his life.

Now it was almost the chief object of his semi-comatose thought as he journeyed to his office in the morning, for nearly every house he passed by had a fanlight; and it was in these he had found the sought-for link.

One of his most cherished faculties—a survival of his childish days—was that power of pushing back the horizon of the world he lived in, that spiritualising of the material limit, an essential part of the heaven of children, for whom the trees that hedge about the garden they play in, may hide away a Tir na nOg.

And hence for him the sight of the stuffed bird, the curiously depraved fish, above all

the white horse in the fanlight, were no mere ornaments stuck up to decorate, but rather a suggestion of a wonderful existence within.

By virtue of these things he had ceased to heed the apparent inhospitality of the perpetually closed doors; for in them there was extended to him an invitation to a more intimate knowledge than could be attained by any more obvious entry.

Never for a moment did it occur to him that these things could have come there by chance. That they had been picked up at some city auction, and without other reason had been placed above the door. They were there as the culmination of a process which had taken ages to fulfil—the incarnation and materialisation of the fitting symbol inevitably evoked by the years that had passed.

The multitude of the white horses had for long perplexed him, but at last he had found their meaning, and he still in a manner kept sacred the anniversary of that great day on which the intuition had first come to him.

At one time (so it told him) Dublin had been invaded by an irresistible and

splendid host of these wonderful white horses, which had descended on it suddenly from some far-off country of great plains and white cities; and having conquered, they had, after the manner of conquerors, taken up their abode in the homes of the conquered race.

But it was not in every house these spotless victors would rest, and he had learned to look with a certain reverence on any house above whose door he saw the familiar horse. They were the chosen ones, and therefore fit objects of his homage.

But with his thought of these things, with that attitude of mind which had become a perpetual homage, there began to mingle another and a stranger feeling. A feeling which at first had only the unrest attendant on an unsatisfied curiosity, but which had begun now to assume the proportions of a growing fear, of an imminent terror which was not to be put by.

It had begun with his first noting of the white horses, for the raised fore-leg was obvious in all of them, and could hardly escape the most casual glance.

But whereas to the casual passer-by it was only a fitting and graceful attitude, a decorative gesture restful to the eye, to him it was the cause of an increasing uneasiness —the very symbol of unrest.

Gradually his thoughts began to circle altogether about this particular; and finally, instead of dwelling with the old and reverent (if unexpressed) attention on the presence of those white conquerors, moved uneasily and without ceasing to the thought of their ultimate going forth.

In short, they awaited, but not with the same proud peace, that signal for which the white horses seemed to stand in readiness for ever.

Sometimes he wondered vaguely if any other dweller in the city had any knowledge of the thing which was imminent, or whether he was alone in his awful illumination, and with this idea he would often scan the faces of the passers-by, seeking for he knew not what sign by which he might recognise a secret master of the guild.

As for the chosen ones who dwelt beneath the shelter of the white multitude, never for a moment did his reverential

homage question the fullness of their knowledge. They knew about it all. They knew! They knew!

So day after day, by virtue of this inner light, he passed through these places like one consecrated on his way to the office.

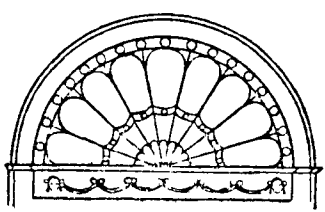
Once, in his rash novitiate, he had allowed a sacrilegious curiosity to propose its obstinate questionings as to the ultimate end of the event he waited for; he had even in his ignorance formulated many theories in satisfaction of its monotonous demands.

This raised fore-leg, alert for movement (so one of these theories had suggested), was but a symbol of that uncertainty of purpose, that ineffectual grasp on the things of earth, which had left his native land so many ages behind all other modern countries, and the setting down of it would be the signal for the release of a great and long-latent force of national character, which, once roused, would place it in the forefront of the world.

Or again, that with the setting down of that fore-leg there would come a wild burst of music, a sound of whinnying and whistling as if all the horses and curlews

of the world were to cry out suddenly together, and at the sound of it all the fairy hosts of Ireland, now exiled under the green hills or within the caves and woods or wandering disconsolate shades beside its grey sea-borders, would come forth, wild with the joy of freedom, to claim again a land which was ordained their native country before the beginning of time. Bitterly he repented of ideas so profane, of theories which would have limited to a mere national significance things too great and eternal for the mind to grasp.

Many another theory, too, had arisen star-like in this waiting heaven of his, only to fade out in the light of his growing intuition; but now at last his mind had come to wear the calm of the initiate, and in unquestioning and adoring quietude he awaited the manifestation of the sign.



IN STEPHEN'S GREEN.

HERE are days when Nature is obviously posing, when the picture is palpably arranged, when we can almost see how the colours are put on. Nature is speaking, as it were, in the terms of art, and it is the hour of the decadent.

To him, for whom the primal forces, the naked aspects of things make but discord and chaos, this careful arrangement in half-tones, this skilfully conducted expression in undertones, is not only infinitely more desirable, but it is for him perhaps the only mood in which Nature is not altogether alien.

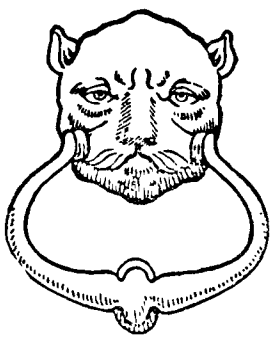
And in Stephen's Green this morning the mere loveliness of the picture is almost sufficient to justify his choice. In that rare light of a hidden sun, the delicate network almost a mist of leafless trees has a strangely unearthly look—the very atmosphere of fairy tale. No mere Irish folk-tale, but the

genuine cosmopolitan all-comprehending thing. It is the atmosphere which the convention demands and, in the fairy tale, convention is the voice of God.

The brown water-fowl, which in moving hardly stir the surface of the deep brown water, might be chocolate ducks on a sea of treacle. Strange creatures they are—these guests of ours which have come from such far places to grace a Dublin pond. Well content they seem and seldom home-sick, and after all why should they be? For can they not go straight back to their native countries in a single cry? That small bird standing at the edge of the little island there with his eyes shut can put more of Norway and its fiords and pine-trees into a single cry than you could get in a twelve-guinea tour. And here is another which has all the south and its sunlight in a sound that is little more than a sigh. How weird it sounds in the night-time—this crying of the wild birds. An alien sound which can change the duck ponds to enchanted seas, and the very windows of the Shelbourne to magic casements. To some I believe this crying of the birds is an uncomfortable thing. To me it has never

brought any other discomfort than the fear that some time it might cease. That some night (towards midnight perhaps) a sudden silence would fall like that silence which fell on the oracles at the coming of the Christos; and in the morning I should find but empty ponds. For long this fear of danger to my beloved birds had haunted me; it had become a sort of terror. If anyone had been incited of the devil to shoot any one of them I should have looked at once, like the witch of a hundred fairy tales, for a bullet wound somewhere near my heart. But the park is well protected, and it was not the sportsman I dreaded. No; my chief fear (to the stones be it said), my chief fear was—of the Gaelic League. It is still a source of wonder to me that no enthusiastic Gaelic Leaguer has yet protested against the presence of these foreign birds on our Irish ponds. But as time passes and my birds swim on as ever, I begin to believe more in what I had at first considered to be a wild supposition—that there exists between the Gaelic League and these wild birds which cry to them in a language as strange as their own, "some bond," "unknown to them and us." That

they, too, like the wild birds, are aliens in the Ireland of to-day; they, too, speak a language unintelligible to the multitude; and that they, too, perhaps, by the very voicing of it can build up again about them their native country—that Ireland of their thoughts and dreams.



ON WINDOW BLINDS.

HE thoughts which are but now finding an imperfect expression came into being many years ago; in fact, when I was but four years old they had a more complete form than my memory can now give them.

From where I lay in my bed in the morning I could see the lawn outside my window, and the elm tree, and a little space of sky above it. This window of mine was covered in the night-time by a green Venetian blind; and one of the most vivid and real recollections of this period of my childhood—indeed, perhaps, the only real one—is the raising of that blind in the morning.

It was the beginning of each day to me, and had become a sort of ritual. The spring blind (outcome and symbol of the hideous speed of this later day) had not yet come into fashion, and the raising of my

blind was a slow and stately performance, well pleasing to the reverent young eyes which viewed it in the light of a sacred office.

But almost as real as this memory of the raising of the blind is the memory of the protest, deeper because it never dared an expression, which arose in my mind morning after morning, against what seemed to me to be an error in the arrangement of things, and a digression from the divine order of events.

That blind should have been lowered—not raised. The first thing I looked for in the morning was the little space of sky, and second the elm tree, and last, if at all, the strip of well-kept lawn. Now in the raising of the blind this order was reversed; and the sight of the lawn first, and then the elm tree, was hardly tolerated in my impatience to see the sky.

I do not know if this feeling is one which is common to all children; but, to the Irish child at least, the sky as a symbol of the unattainable must surely hold first place in that strange religion which is the indisputable heritage of all childhood.

Even in the summer-time the song of the

birds, first sound of the morning, which awakened me, made me look, not at the leafy boughs they sang amongst, but rather at the morning sky to which they sang. And long after I had left that old house where my childhood was spent, when the lawn and the elm and even the bit of sky had become indistinct and illusive things, my memory of that morning ritual was still fresh and vivid, and the protest still living, though latent, in my heart.

It was with a sense of delightful gratification then that in my schooldays I discovered one day, quite suddenly, what seemed to me not only an explanation, but a splendid justification of my childish instinct. In a book on the Greek drama I read that the curtain on the stage at Athens moved, as I would have had my blind move, in the reverse of the ordinary way. From the moment of that discovery I knew myself a Greek. Their people became my people, and their gods my gods. For these people understood the divine order of things.

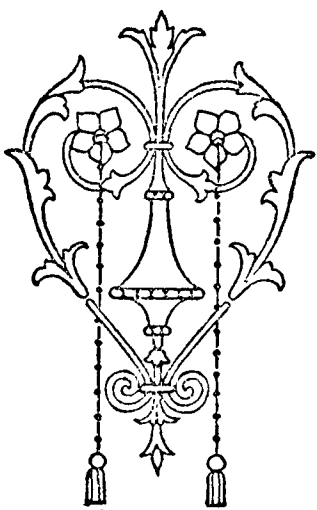
To my classmates that sentence in the old lesson book meant nothing more than

a fact to be learned; to me it was a Peak in Darien and my very Pisgah; from which I could see, not, indeed, into any strange country, but back into that æsthetic heaven, from which the unfortunate chance of birth into an ignorant and alien world had made me an exile.

The moment before the rise of the curtain is only a moment, but, as every lover of the stage must know, the impression then received lasts through the whole performance. The Greeks had recognised this, and therefore in their theatres the curtain moved in the manner I have described. What a preparation for a play that was! the gradual unveiling of the sky, of the stars perhaps, and what an ending! On our modern stage, as everyone knows, the first things to be seen (and the last) are the boots of the actors. Mr. Tree, Mr. Martin Harvey, and others in a less degree, have made heroic efforts to ameliorate things by making their boots speak, as it were. But even the splendid eloquence of Mr. Tree's boots cannot save the situation. However, I am writing about window-blinds, and not the stage.

Anyone who does not at once and

instinctively feel that I am right had better not try to. I am no evangelist. I have no desire to see my "heaven crammed." Indeed, I doubt if it would hold more than one, this heaven of mine. And perhaps I am the last of the Greeks.



THE CANAL.

S he turned the corner of the street and arrived at the canal bridge his tram was already vanishing in the distance; there would not be another he knew for nearly seven minutes, and half-glad of the excuse for stopping, he resigned himself to the transmuting magic of his favourite place. From where he leaned above the stonework of the bridge the water stretched out calmly with its hardly perceptible motion between the long glittering lines of the railway and the narrow towpath, where it seemed that no one ever walked. But straight before him lay that bridge which always held entranced his thoughts and feelings, which had always been to him amongst the inner circle of the things he held most sacred, because through it he had come near to an understanding of that magic which seemed to call to him in the very first aspect of all canals.

Now, as always, he saw it in its perpetual shrouding of grey mist, and over it passed backwards and forwards those mysterious figures, each in his vestiture of silence on his own high lonely business, and in an incommunicable calm. To suggest to him that those people went there for any reason sprung of mundane things would have been an intolerable sacrilege not to be borne of one to whom had been vouchsafed a particle of the inner knowledge.

His thoughts began as usual to pierce beyond this first bridge—the only visible one—to where he knew the second must lie. Never had he dared to explore beyond that visible boundary, for in it he recognised and venerated a limit set by the gods to guard about their hidden things. But he knew, as certainly as though he had seen it, that it lay there just beyond his vision, and that over it too passed and repassed the unceasing figures, but in a more dreadful calmness and shrouded in darker mystery like the figures of some Dantean dream. And once, in one of those moments of his highest being, when the things of this life had been most completely

relegated to a lower place of his consciousness, he had dared to venture on the imagination of a third and ultimate bridge. About it, as around the other bridges, there lay a mist, but it was no longer of an earthly grey, but such a glowing of pearly light as veils about the thrones of the De Danaans. And over this bridge no shrouded figures moved, as in the others, unceasingly back and forward. Here there was no remotest suggestion of secret errandry or any hidden aim. But sometimes (and always as an event long waited for) on the full tide of the crescendo of a pulsing stillness, a great and radiant figure, from whose gestures all earthly similitude had long since been shaken, passed over into a white country of unutterable joy.

From contemplation of these things his thoughts shrank back, as was their wont, into the idea of the prospect which lay behind him, and to a less disturbing joy. So familiar had the appearance of these places grown to him that without turning he could see it all. The water with the same unbroken quietness of motion flowing between grassy banks, the little houses whose gardens stretched down to the brink

of the water and ended indefinitely amongst the tiny sedges, the white ducks which swam there for ever—all had contributed their share in the building up for him a symbol of the highest existence, a life of uninterrupted communion with beautiful and simple things.

Further on the little houses grew less frequent, and finally the water flowed between uninhabited fields. Once again he sailed away with a sort of impetus (the revolt of the human from the grey and deterrent aspect of that forbidden country before him) to explore these joyful places. On and on he sailed, and always with new joys to mark his progress, till the fields became only a procession of colours and the skies a magical changing of strange lights. All the multitudinous coloured skies which seemed to hover day by day above the long line of the canal (and nowhere else) were manifesting themselves by turn as he journeyed, till at last they resolved themselves into that glory of sunset gold and copper which he knew so well. The country he travelled through seemed to grow momentarily more familiar. A group of trees beside the embankment sent

a strange thrill of recognition through him, for he knew them well. Trees! rather the souls of trees, for the light of innumerable sunsets had long since burned from them all vestige of mortal growth save their lovely and unchanging forms. Now they existed only as the very idea of trees, even as they must have existed in that divine mind which "imagined the trees before they were in the fields."

Now the light began to change, and he knew that evening was creeping on. The fields and hedges began to gather about them the blue mists of twilight, and to assume their real forms. A poplar like a hand held up to command a silence of all things appeared vaguely for a moment on his right.

Everything began to assume strange forms and shapes, but more familiar as they grew stranger. He could no longer see the towpath except when the moon shone out fully, and even then he could no longer distinguish the outline of the horse which drew his barge. Again he passed a group of poplars, but different from the more clearly outlined trees which had passed him earlier. The moon was

behind them, and across its calm light the tallest of the three poplars stretched its delicate straight branches. He began to think of that wanderer who once found out the country of the poplars, and having dwelt there a while had come back again crazed with its silver light, but bringing with him a certain wild wisdom garnered from that silence which they keep amongst them for ever unbroken, and how he had put some of this wisdom into songs and sung them along the roadways of his native place on moonlit nights. What if this voyage of his were to have such an ending!

The shadows grew heavier about him, and then the moon withdrew behind a cloud and he sailed on in darkness. Gradually he fell into a half-dream in which it seemed that everything was transformed. The vessel he sailed in was no longer the familiar barge, but a pinnace of the loveliest shape, and its tall prow cut the water as though it voyaged through air. And instead of the horse which had strained at the end of the cumbersome rope he saw, with a half-terror, that his pinnace was drawn by two lovely winged figures who sailed in the air before him with an

even and calm progress full of unearthly majesty. His momentary terror gave way to a thrill of the wildest joy, and opening his eyes he looked about him; then all his terror returned to him with overwhelming force, for the moon was shining out again, and by its light he saw that everything was in reality as he had seen it in his dream. And beside him, in the prow of the pinnace and gazing out straight before her in Sphinx-like majesty, was a woman of unearthly beauty. The loud jangling of the tram bell warned him that his seven minutes was at an end. How quickly it had passed! The red-haired conductor was stamping sullenly on the gong and glared at him as he mounted, last of all the passengers, and he sought a seat in the corner with a subdued feeling, but wondering vaguely why an all-wise God had ever been indiscreet enough to permit of the existence of a red-haired man.

IN THE BOTANIC GARDENS.

HE Spring is assuredly with us again, for there is no possibility of mistaking those signs and tokens which announce its advent as surely as did the floating plumes and pennons of an earlier day, when kings were still kingly, the advent of some returning victor.

The very air proclaims it, and those light winds which send the little summery clouds arace across the deep blue of the heavens, like holiday children in their gauzy frocks.

And here beneath the trees beside the Tolka in the stillness of the sunny morning the signs of it are very plain. The branches are almost unmoving; the tap of a spade on the ground, the creaking of a wheelbarrow, the occasional tearing of a withered branch seem to mingle naturally with the unceasing bird-song and intensify rather than disturb in any way the pastoral quiet of the place.

The sudden plop of a leaping fish comes

suddenly and distinctly from beneath the rustic bridge. The long circles spread slowly outwards, and the last circle coming closely to the nearer edge heaves gently beneath the little shining water-beetle who lies motionless on the sunny surface beside the grassy margin. As though the gentle movement had awakened him he shoots off swiftly and circles like a child at hide-and-seek between the cropped stalks of last season's water-lilies.

Another joins the game and soon the water is flashing with the reflection of their wet and shining backs. Beneath them in the cool shadows of the water-plants the dark forms of the fish are moving in more quiet rounds.

A bird flies suddenly from the larch-tree beside me, and a moment later her clear note comes challenging from a neighbouring elm.

Then something white gleams for a moment amongst the long tree shadows on the sunlit grass bank beyond and a ripple of girlish laughter comes floating across the stream. A sound which can still awaken the fawn in the heart of a man.

In another moment surely a naked,

laughing nymph will flash across that open sunlit space before the sudden onslaught of some hooved centaur, who is even now awaiting his moment behind the shadowed branches of that sheltered corner.

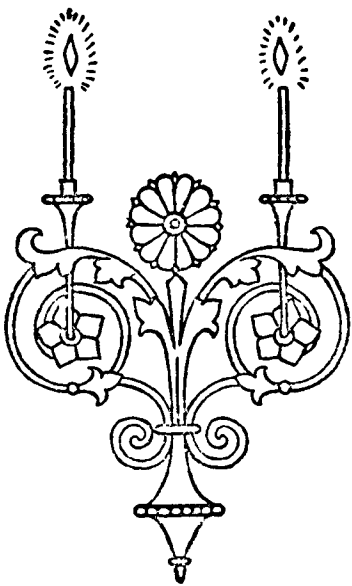
One can almost see from here the horned head and leering mouth behind the sheltering boughs.

Something certainly stirred there where the shadow is deepest. Then again the dark form makes a deeper shadow amongst the trees. It is creeping closer. And now an open space discloses the floating vestments of a nun.

With her hands folded in the traditional gesture of her Order she moves with little swift footsteps through all this carnival of Spring song and sunlight.

Her young face in its heavy setting is bowed earthwards as though she must not hear the all-too-obvious meaning in the singing of the birds. As though she must not hear the lovely and shy laughter of the trees, nor the things which Spring, that shameless lover, keeps whispering in their leaves. As though she must not even seem aware of that one consummation to which all glad things move. And so she

passes swiftly onward, unseeing, unhearing, till she reaches the little pathway to the great grey Convent, around which the austere lines of the cedar trees seem to keep an eternal shade.



THE ULTIMATE.

IT is only the casual visitor to Dublin, or the most obtuse of its inhabitants, who can be blind to those varying moods, full of meaning which are the most wonderful characteristics of this wonderful city in which we live.

To me they are as familiar as the procession of the passing hours. Most familiar, perhaps, is that mood which takes the streets at the end of day; when the tall, old, red-brick houses around the northern district deepen to purple in the evening air; when York Street is clothed in a garment of violet which momentarily grows richer in the aspect of its texture, and the street-children, like small elves, come out to dance with strange, monotonous songs and gestures through the shadowy places of a purple world.

And later, when those purple shadows have deepened into half darkness, and the

last tiny dancer has vanished into the deeper shadow of some ancient doorway, there is another and hardly less characteristic mood. When the street lamps begin to glow faintly, like strange flowers in the soundless deeps of the ocean, and the uneven line of the house-tops shows dimly in exquisite silhouette, when the hard edges and angles of things seem to have been smoothed away with the disappearing daylight, and even a poet may walk the streets securely, and without fear of jostling in a world of curves.

These moods are pleasant things, and have given to Dublin a great share of that sweetness which is its most unvarying quality.

But there is yet another mood, and with its approach, towards the hour of midnight, comes the shadow of shadow, the first note of warning of that sinister theme, the tragic motif in the symphony which is Dublin.

A deep silence holds the streets, save only when the iron gratings rattle beneath the feet of the last straggler across town. On the old Parliament House the statues stand up lonely and dreadful, with a mean-

ing which is known only to the night. The immovable quiet of the spires has now lost the sense of restfulness which, through the daytime, it never fails to give, and even the crosses above the chapel hold out no longer a hope, but rather a warning menace.

Now every shadow holds a policeman, the most retiring race on earth, and even the shadow which conceals no lurking officer has taken on his form.

Something suddenly rattles over the stones beyond the river, and a black thing draws nearer in the distance, and now it is close at hand. A hearse, drawn by two great horses, their size magnified a thousandfold by the black trappings, the cloths and plumes, with which they are invested. Up aloft, as though beyond the reach of human voice or contact, the two drivers sit immovable, their long crepe streamers floating on the air. Two carriages follow, and all three disappear into the darkness as they have come.

Again the silence reigns unbroken; a little wave breaks unaccountably against the jetty beneath O'Connell Bridge.

Then quite suddenly and soundlessly something comes again into the distant

view. At first it seems but a concentration of the darkness, an intensification of the night. Gradually it draws nearer, and now it takes the centre of the street. It is moving along the deserted tram-lines, along those same lines on which, earlier in the night, those gorgeous palaces of light had moved exultant and graceful, like gondolas along the waterways of Venice.

But it is an alien on the familiar track, and it sits there as some nightmare figure might sit in the arm-chair beside the dreamer's bed.

Shapeless, uncouth, like some serpent full to satiety, it moves slowly and painfully along its undeviating course.

Dreadful, irresistible, inevitable, as the dream of a sick child, it takes its way, a conquering darkness against whose progression a futile humanity might beat its tiny fists in vain.

A drunken straggler on the pathway has stopped to observe its progress, and conscious only for the moment that something is moving along the tram lines, staggers towards the centre of the street.

In another moment he realises what he has done, and sobered suddenly by that

realisation of his own blasphemous audacity, turns wearily to his homeward track.

It has reached the corner of Abbey Street; follow it, and look along the direction of its going. There is nothing to be seen. As though the earth had suddenly received it back into some awful darkness from which it came, it has vanished.

Only in the far distance a small black object is rapidly disappearing from view. That may be it—*but what is it?*

A RETURN.

OTHING had altered: the little grey church with the ruins of an older building half-hidden in the churchyard beside it; the little sweetshop on the other side of the road, with its fly-stained windows and rows of sugarstick in wide-mouthed bottles; and—yes—the old woman still sitting behind the little counter; the tall public-house with its bricks of hideous yellow—the very colour of an unsatisfied thirst. Nothing was altered. And after all, why should anything have altered? It was but a year and a half since he had last come by these ways. Only a year and a half!

But that was to measure time by the ordinary standard, a thing he abhorred.

His heart still rebelled as of old against the stupid prejudice which had invented this method of its measurement. It was ridiculous that time should be represented

as progressing in the manner in which a train moves along its rails.

It was absolutely wrong. But his theory of its correct representation was still in that chaotic condition in which it had first come to him; and now, as always, he subsided into the restful certainty of his intuition.

He passed, without stopping, the ivy-covered stone bridge over which he had leaned Sunday after Sunday to watch the little fish that faced, almost motionless, the gentle current of the stream, and in a few moments he had come to the cross roads and the laundry which stood by the river.

Yes, the white hens were still feeding upon the grass by the doorway, and he remembered with a strange sadness the absurd thought which had come to him in a happier time—that they had been placed there as an advertisement for the perfect method of the place. He remembered, too, how he had wondered if any influence of the sweet water and the pure air which came from the hills had ever gone into the city with the vanloads of white linen; what a strange and delightful thing it would be if some bank clerk in College Green, walking secure and rampant in stiff linen,

had some day been overcome with a sudden sense—but the remembrance of these earlier fancies was too painful for him, and he was coming also to the turning of the road beyond which he knew he would catch a first sight of the hills. Again the thoughts of the past days came about him, for it was at this point that always, unfailingly the overwhelming influence of the hills used to come upon him. Here suddenly he used to spring up to his full height, and for the rest of his journey walk in the manner of the gods. Here, too, it was that everything he had ever written had derived its rhythms. And now he had turned the corner.

The lovely line of the hills stretched out before him, the little hill with its stooping pine trees that went clambering up the side like a defeated army; and, yes, the little bright space of sky, a wonder still unexplained, which seemed to hang for ever above the valley. Nothing was altered. For a moment he stood watching it all, and then, with a sound that was perilously near a sob, he sank down upon the grassy wall which ran beside the road. He had turned the corner, he had entered into his sacred

place again; but what a return! His mind was a perfect blank—not a thought, not a feeling, not an emotion. What had happened?

Suddenly a faint feeling of rebellion arose in him, and he stood up again, and with his face turned down to avoid the proud and silent scrutiny of the hills which had disowned him, he journeyed on. But gradually his steps grew slow, and finally they stopped. Again he sat down by the roadside, but this time under the very hills. After all, whose fault was it? The hills, he knew, had never altered; the river had still the sound he knew and loved. His eyes grew blurred with something he would never have called tears.

. . . . . .

As the tram passed over the bridge which spans the river at Rathfarnham the rain began to fall, and when it reached the outskirts of the city, and those first faint lights which serve to reveal the squalor of Camden Street, his coat was already soaked, and the heavy drops were falling from the brim of his disreputable hat.

Through the journey his thoughts had carried him beyond the perception of

discomfort, but when he at last arrived at the vicinity of his favourite haunt it was with a sense of more than ordinary pleasure that he sought the protection of the laurel-sheltered door.

As he drew his high stool nearer to the counter he smiled at the remembrance which had suddenly come to him of a time when such a place had needed the allurement of a hypothetical tradition; when the ordinary sights and sounds of a public-house—the sodden sawdust, the filthy counter still greasy from the mid-day luncheons—had filled him with disgust. When the raucous murmur in the throat of a vanman, invariable preliminary to the pint, had been sufficient to take from him his unsatisfied thirst.

By almost imperceptible degrees he had grown to tolerate, and finally even to love, these sordid surroundings of his chosen refuge, and he would have listened with impatience to any criticism of their shortcomings.

The pint in its brimming pewter was before him, and the peace which comes with its possession began to filter into his heart.

With that slow deliberation which comes only from the anticipation of a well-proven pleasure he gripped the handle and buried his mouth in the froth. Slowly still he elevated the shining tankard, inclining slightly backward on the stool, his heels implanted firmly on the second rung, and his eyes began to wander until at last they settled vaguely and unseeing upon the cob-webbed ceiling of the room.

The friendly barman, knowing well this nightly ritual, waited in respectful silence, then as the empty pewter came again to the counter he removed it with quiet speed, and the soft rushing sound announced the advent of the second pint.

This sound, this soft tumult in the frothing tankard, had always held a wonderful charm, a suggestion of that delicate stir and rustle which breathes through the young branches of the forest in the intervals of the blackbird's song.

Again the pewter was before him, and now the barman retired softly, knowing the more lengthy duration of this second pint—a thing of deeper and more leisurely joy. The first draught was little more than a sip, and the light foam still touched the brim as the tankard was replaced.

With the lessening of this second pint his thoughts began to awaken and circle quietly in their accustomed rounds, and no undue haste in drinking was ever permitted to disturb the harmony of that delicious awakening.

A little later he turned, as was his unfailing habit, and looked into the long mirror by his side, and with a sort of tired persistency began to analyse the picture which it presented to his gaze.

The black unshapely hat was still soaked, and still a drop fell occasionally upon the green and shining shoulders of the thin top-coat which was buttoned, with upturned collar, about his throat.

He smiled again as he remembered how those same green shoulders, once black, had often delighted him with their suggestion of the delicate green of the lichen on the branches of the young trees in the spring. Now, in their soaking state, they resembled rather the green slime which lines the wharves and jetties of the Liffey when the water is at low tide.

Suddenly his eyes turned from the contemplation of the top-coat and were confronted by their reflected gaze. The

ridiculous seriousness of the eyes in the mirror seemed to have in it something utterly comical, and as he met it he laughed aloud.

A vacant-looking youth standing beside him in converse with some companions, who listened with the exaggerated interest of the semi-drunk, turned sharply and stared for a moment at the figure by the mirror, and as he turned again to his companions a smile of contemptuous pity passed around the group.

He became aware at once of the crowded bar, the double row of drinkers which lined the entire length of the room, and, emptying quickly the little which remained in his tankard, he tapped sharply on the counter.

As the third pint was laid before him he glanced at the clock. It wanted but a few moments of closing time. In a little while the glass doors would be closed behind him; he would be launched quietly on to a sea of vague sounds and elemental conversings, and voices calling for pints across the world.

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Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 20 February, 2020